

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, November 12, 1877, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. University
Glasgow, Monday, November 12, 1877. My dear Mrs. Bell:

It seems a perfect age since I last wrote to, or heard from you, and yet it cannot be so long ago as I remember writing to you of Alec's lecture and that was not a fortnight ago. We had a letter from you, I don't know when for Alec did not tell me of it and I found it in his pocket only the other day. I am so sorry and ashamed that you should have been so long without a word from either of us, and hope it will not happen again, especially as we shall soon be settled for the winter.

We left London Tuesday Morning, the 6th., expecting to reach Glasgow at eight o'clock that evening. It was nearly three next morning before we did get there. Early at four o'clock Tuesday morning two freight trains collided and one engine was thrown over the bank and other wagons fell the next track. Before there was time to warn it the Express from Dorchester came rushing up, the Engine driver managed to switch off to the side track avoiding another collision, but getting thrown off the track, it took all day to clear away the debris when we passed at four in the afternoon the work was not half done and we counted eight trains waiting to pass. We went on safely until we got beyond Prenton and then our driver caught sight of a boy running down the track with danger signals and stopped the engine, just in time for not a hundred yards in front the ruins of two other freight trains lay across our track and we had nearly run into them. The second collision had happened but ten minutes before when one of the trains was trying to get out of our way. We were delayed over six hours. We heard afterwards that there were no less than four accidents on that line that day and we considered ourselves most fortunate in only being delayed. Next morning Mr. Bottomley, Sir William Thomson's nephew and assistant

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came to see us at Queens Hotel and to tell us that the other day when Sir William was riding home from some Telephonic experiments the horses dashed sharply around a corner and the carriage was thrown completely on its side. — Sir William was severely bruised, another 2 gentleman had his arm broken. Sir William was in bed that day, but still they wanted us to come up to them at once. Their house formed the pleasantest end of a right angle of professors houses enclosing the east wing of the University. It did not look large from the outside and I was astonished to be ushered into a large square hall, upstairs into a long handsome drawing room as large or larger than ours at home persian rug carpets covered all the floors except the bedrooms, handsome velvet chairs and a big couch with handsome fur rug thrown over it. Magnificent and elegant knickknacks beautiful china of beautiful form and color stand in tasteful confusion about— A handsome house all through, and handsome through the taste and judgement of its mistress and not of the upholsterer. There are houses that show all over the mark of the store, others of a particular style and fashion, but this belongs to neither. Each piece has been collected at different places at different times chosen solely for their beauty or usefulness and when all arranged together the rooms have a particular style of their own. Lady Thomson is from Madiera and there are handsome carved table and chairs of black Madiera wood that take my fancy more than anything else. Lady Thomson herself in a kind gracious lady cordial and frank to all. Her house is seldom empty, young and old men and ladies drop in naturally for a pleasant chat with her on learned discussions with her husband. The table service is handsome and stately like Lady Jones, yet wanting its stiffness. Sir William is a slight tall man all skin and bones like my father of whom he constantly reminds me in more ways than one, very gentle and unassuming and most kind in manner toward Alec. Alec is wild over him and Sir William seems to like him too, seeming to talk preferably with him and Lady Thomson dares not to go to bed each night and leave her husband alone with mine for fear he will talk all night. And Alec is so delighted and happy to find that he can talk with and interest such a man, and that in his own province,— Acoustics — he can give him information; just now they are eagerly discoursing vowel pitches the relation of sub-harmonics to the fundamentals. Alec defending Helmholtz' theory whatever it may

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be, and Sir William taking the opposite side. He talks of making an instrument to test his opinion. Alec has been in town all day long hard at work with an Artist on the illustrations for his lecture on "Visible Speech" Wednesday before the Philosophical Society of which Sir William is President. Mr. Bottomley has constructed a telephone which they think talks through the artificial Atlantic cable but they must test it in various ways before they can be sure and then if successful Alec says we are to go to Ireland and try to talk with Mr. Watson. Alec's lecture on the 8th., was the most successful in point of numbers of any there being about 3,000 people there. The Greenook lecture too was very well attended. We have engaged a furnished house in South Washington for six months or a year No. 57 West Cromwell Road, about six minutes from Mrs. Home's. The rent is L 225 a year and L 125 for six months. The furniture is very handsome and now and altogether the house is the prettiest and most convenient of any we have soon. We will have Mary Home and probably Mrs. Home's cook who is said to be a treasure. We move into the house on the 1st. of next month.

I must close now for I can hardly see what I am writing and it is so cold that my finger will hardly guide the pen aright, I hope you will be able to read this nevertheless.

Please give my love to Mr. Bell and the Miss Symonds, and with love to yourself.

Your affectionate daughter, Mabel.